00814

1971/03/18

Department of State TELEGRAM

SECRET

P R 181707Z MAR 71
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO RUMJIR/AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY 8317
INFO RUFNCR/USDEL FRANCE 5925
BT
S E C R E T STATE 045511

6058-590
1971 MAR 18 1707Z

WHITE HOUSE
SITUATION ROOM
71 MAR 18 PM 2:22

NODIS

PARIS MEETINGS

SUBJ: POW RELEASE INITIATIVE

REF: A. STATE 41214; B. SAIGON 3704

1. US CONGRESS HAD ADOPTED RESOLUTION DECLARING MARCH 21-26 "NATIONAL WEEK OF CONCERN FOR POW/MIA'S", AND PRESIDENT IS EXPECTED SHORTLY TO ISSUE PROCLAMATION TO THIS EFFECT. WE BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US/GVN TO PUT FORWARD SIGNIFICANT POW RELEASE PROPOSAL IN PARIS MEETING THAT WEEK, IN ORDER TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON OUR SIDE'S EFFORTS TO MAKE PROGRESS IN THIS AREA, AND OTHER SIDE'S CONTINUED INTRANSIGENCE.

2. NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES OF US PW/MIA'S IN SOUTHEAST ASIA HAS WRITTEN PRESIDENT NIXON PROPOSING THAT US/GVN RELEASE 1610 ABLE-BODIED PW'S TO MARK THIS "WEEK OF CONCERN". WE RECOGNIZE GVN HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO RELEASE ABLE-BODIED POW'S EXCEPT ON BASIS OF RECIPROCITY, BUT WE HOPE THEY CAN BE PERSUADED TO TABLE RENEWED OFFER OF LARGE-SCALE NON-RECIPROCAL POWE RELEASE AT PARIS MEETING MARCH 25. IN MAKING SUCH A PROPOSAL GVN COULD AGAIN HIGHLIGHT OTHER SIDE'S REFUSAL TO COOPERATE IN REPATRIATION EFFORTS (AS IN JAN 24 REPATRIATION ACROSS DMZ), THUS MAKING CLEAR THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR NON-FULFILLMENT OF GVN'S RELEASE OFFERS RESTS SQUARELY WITH OTHER SIDE.

3. IN PRESENTING THIS TO GVN YOU COULD MAKE POINT THAT GVN UNILATERAL OFFER JAN 26 TO RELEASE ALL SICK AND WOUNDED ENCOMPASSED SOME 2000 PW'S, WELL OVER THE NUMBER SUGGESTED BY THE LEAGUE OF FAMILIES. TO PROVIDE NEW ELEMENT, GVN THIS TIME COULD ALSO INCLUDE PW'S HELD FOR LONGEST TIME (E.G., OVER THREE OR FOUR YEARS). YOU COULD REMIND GVN THAT ARTICLE 109 OF GPW CONVENTION PROVIDES FOR DIRECT REPATRIATION OF "ABLED-BODIED PRISONERS OF WAR WHO HAVE UNDERGONE A LONG PERIOD OF CAPTIVITY." YOU COULD ALSO NOTE THAT UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 2676 ADOPTED DECEMBER 1970 WITH STRONG USG AND FREE

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WORLD SUPPORT SPECIFICALLY ENDORSED THIS ASPECT OF GPW. YOU COULD FURTHER MAKE POINT TO GVN THAT PROPOSAL INVOLVING LONG-HELD PRISONERS WOULD BE LESS LIKELY TO CAUSE THE ADVERSE REACTION IN SVN TO RELEASE OF "ABLE-BODIED" PRISONERS THAT GVN LEADERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT. SUGGEST YOU ALSO TELL GVN THAT, IN OUR JUDGMENT, POW'S RETURNED TO NVN ARE LIKELY TO POSE PROBLEM FOR NVN AUTHORITIES, AND ARE UNLIKELY TO BE TRUSTED OR SENT BACK TO BATTLE IN SVN.

4. REGARDING NUMBERS, ALTHOUGH LEAGUE OF FAMILIES (AND NUMBER OF CONGRESSMEN) HAVE SUGGESTED MATCHING US PW/MIA TOTAL (1610) WE SUGGEST OFFER BE LARGER, TO REFLECT GVN CONCERN ALSO FOR ITS OWN MEN IN ENEMY HANDS.

5. REQUEST YOU DISCUSS WITH GVN WITH AIM OF HAVING SUBSTANTIAL NEW RELEASE OFFER MADE AT MACH 25 PARIS MEETING.
ROGERS
BT

DRAFTED BY: U/PW:FASieverts
APPROVED BY: Wm. H. Sullivan
CLEARANCES: EA/VN - Mr. Moffett
DOD/ISA - Mr. Shields
Radm. Epes
DOD/ISA - LCol Haggard
U - Mr. Irwin (subs)
White House - Mr. Holdridge
S/S - Mr. Curran

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